

IDEAS | RITA INDIANA

Puerto Rico, the oldest colony in the world, gives the world a master class on mobilization

By Rita Indiana · July 26, 2019, 5:23 p.m.



Colorful, massive protests forced Puerto Rico's governor, Ricardo Rosselló, from office. JOE RAEDLE/GETTY IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

SAN JUAN

EVERY NIGHT LAST week, people of all ages in neighborhoods all over this city went out on their balconies at 8 o'clock to take part in the ["cacerolazo,"](#) a Latin American protest tradition of loudly banging pots (cacerolas) and pans with spoons. This was just one of the ways Puerto Ricans showed their dissatisfaction after the publication of [889 pages of online chats](#) in which Puerto Rican governor Ricardo Rosselló and his closest associates made numerous sexist, homophobic, and violent comments.

In language out of a 1980s frat house, those involved planned how to manipulate public opinion, feeling protected by the walls of the Telegram app. According to Puerto Rico's [Center for Investigative Journalism](#), which published the messages, they also shared illicit information about government contracts. So-called #Telegramgate, which forced Rosselló's resignation at mid-week, is the straw that broke the back of a territory in the midst of its worst fiscal crisis in recent history, with [rampant corruption](#) and the sad weight of the [more than 4,000 deaths](#) from causes related to Hurricane María — mainly as a result of government negligence. These victims were the objects of [the most obscene joke](#) in the whole transcript.

In their memory, protesters laid bouquets of flowers on the barricades that separated protesters from the police protecting La Fortaleza, the residence of Puerto Rico's governors. They arrived on horseback, in fleets of bicycles, and even in the [now-famous motorized cavalry of King Charlie](#), a working-class hero who for three nights gathered together thousands of bikers to shout their message of change, lighting up the tropical night with a river of light and noise. They also arrived by sea. Last Sunday, hundreds of people in kayaks or on surfboards, paddleboards, and jet skis came to La Fortaleza with banners and signs. University professors took turns giving impromptu courses on the history of Puerto Rican resistance, while others read the constitution aloud to the police, who ended the peaceful protests with tear gas bombs, clubs, and rubber bullets every night at 11 on the nose.

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On Monday, about a million people of all ages and classes marched under the ruthless sun, stripped of all partisanship, waving the various flags of this new Puerto Rico: one that is still a territory of the United States, but has a culture of its own, a powerfully inclusive one. It has given the world artists like Ricky Martin, Lin-Manuel Miranda, and Bad Bunny, athletes like boxer Tito Trinidad, and NBA basketball star J.J. Barea — all of whom also asked the governor to go.

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On Wednesday afternoon, drummers gathered in Plaza Colón to play [nlella](#)

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On Tuesday afternoon, protesters gathered in La Fortaleza to pay [tribute](#) and bomba, two Afro-Puerto Rican genres of music. They joined the resistance with rhythms inherited from their ancestors, enslaved Africans to whom the Caribbean owes much of its cultural uniqueness. These encounters happened organically, from one day to the next, organized over social networks with the hashtag #RickyRenuncia (or, “Ricky Resign”). Communities have been crucial in this process. Puerto Rico, the oldest colony in the world, has given the world a master class on mobilization.

Earlier that day, a rumor started that Rosselló would give an address. As the press gathered and people assembled in front of La Fortaleza, dozens of special forces and riot police descended on the area. The governor and his staff kept the press waiting in the conference room for four hours. One last show of incompetence and contempt.

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There was tension in the air. There was rage and joy. Vocalist René Pérez, better known as Residente, sang over the beat of a caravan of cars customized with giant speakers as the evening’s collective perreo began. [Perreo](#) is the Caribbean father of twerking and invariably accompanies reggaeton, the music of the movement, a movement defined by the tactics, tools, and tastes of millennials.

Around midnight [the governor released a video shot at La Fortaleza](#). Looking tired and sad, he listed the achievements of his administration and announced his resignation. Outside, his voice was drowned out by the euphoric shouts of a multitude that surged forward to embrace the police who stood in their way for days. The governor was the first in the island’s history to resign his position.

Rosselló turned over the governorship to Wanda Vázquez, secretary of justice, who [according to documents](#) published on the blog of journalist Sandra Rodríguez Cotto may have coauthored and covered up various corruption schemes.

The hashtag #WandaRenuncia is now trending.

Rita Indiana is a musician and the author of five novels. Follow her on Twitter [@ritaindiana](#). This essay was translated from Spanish by Sydney Hutchinson.

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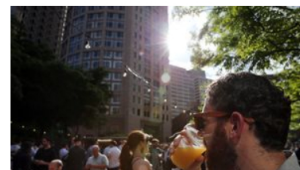
Rainé Riggs, the daughter-in-law of Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, died Saturday shortly after being diagnosed with neuroendocrine cancer.



SHIRLEY LEUNG

I love beer too, but state needs to regulate beer gardens

Beer gardens should be allowed to bloom in Massachusetts, but not by hacking the system while regulators and policy makers look the other way and hope for the best.



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The local women are among dozens across the country who have accused the ride hailing company of failing to add basic security measures that might have prevented the attacks against them.



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Storm is expected to bring days of rain, with high winds and possible power outages

Beginning Wednesday and continuing into Saturday, areas in Southeastern Mass., and the Cape and Islands, could get up to four inches of rain, gusts of 60 miles per hour, and outages.





JEFF JACOBY

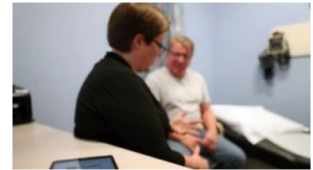
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The Constitution's provisions aren't liberal or conservative. They aren't the weapon of one party or the other. And the results they produce are not illicit or traitorous.



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